

**Minutes**  
**Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting**  
**August 28, 2009 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall**

**Call to Order and Approval of Minutes**

Trustees Board Chair Ms. Gail Nardi called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. She complimented Museum Director John Avoli and the Museum staff for their hard work in the face of what seems to be disproportionate budget reductions levied upon the small agency during the past year. She noted that several new Trustee appointments by Governor Kaine will be announced shortly, and asked all Trustees to work to support and promote the Museum. She also complimented the work to date on the West African Site. The minutes of the April Board of Trustees meeting were approved as corrected.

**Members Attending:**

Mr. T.E. Beck, Jr., Dr. John Bunch, Senator Emmett W. Hanger Jr., Dr. Gabriel Lanier, Delegate Steve Landes, Mr. Frank McDonough, Ms. Gail Nardi, Delegate Kenneth Plum, The Honorable Frank Nolen, Mr. William F. Sibert, Mr. Thomas Sheets, Dr. Cheryl Talley, Mr. Paul Vames,

**Members Absent:**

Delegate Benjamin Cline, Senator Creigh Deeds, Mr. Michael DiGrassie, Mr. George Dygert, Dr. Pamela Fox, Mr. John O. Marsh, Jr., Senator Roscoe Reynolds, Delegate Chris Saxman, Delegate Beverly Sherwood

**Guests Attending:**

Mrs. Maricia Capps, President, American Frontier Culture Foundation; Mr. Ronald Capps, Mr. James Russell, Mr. Robert Fonger, Ms. Cathy McNair, Mrs. Jerry Lynn Shipplett, of the American Frontier Culture Foundation Board of Directors; Mr. Jacob Beleu, Office of the Attorney General, Mr. George Lott and Mr. Ken Knorr, Museum volunteers

**Staff Attending:**

Mr. G. John Avoli, Executive Director, Mr. Eric Bryan, Deputy Director, Ms. Lydia Volskis, Operations Manager, Mr. Michael Sutton, Marketing Director, Mrs. Donna Smith, Fiscal Director, Ms. Frances Carrington, Foundation manager, Mr. Alex Tillen, Interpretive Supervisor, Mr. Mark Gatewood, Museum Project Administrator, Mr. Cliff Edwards, Facilities Manager, Mr. David Puckett, Curator and Collections Manager, Ms. Merritt Schoonover, Visitor Services Supervisor and Accountant Senior.

**Executive Director's Report**

Mr. Avoli echoed Ms. Nardi's remarks and also complimented the staff for their hard work in the face of serious budget reductions over the past year. He also thanked the American Frontier Culture Foundation, and the Museum's volunteers for their support; volunteers gave 4,380 hours of work time between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009.

He reviewed the expanded volunteer program and highlighted the various jobs volunteers perform at the Museum. He especially recognized volunteer George Lott, who is a master woodworker and has built dozens of fine reproduction pieces for the Museum's exhibits over the past several years; Mr. Lott has been joined by new volunteer Ken Knorr who will assist with the project list. Mr. Sheets thanked both men and asked them to describe their work briefly to the Board. Mr. Avoli also thanked volunteer Jack Cameron for his work to photograph the grounds and projects; board members and others enjoy viewing his photo galleries throughout the year via emailed updates.

Mr. Avoli recounted recent successful special events such as the May Day, Wine and BBQ Festivals, and reviewed a list of upcoming special events and Foundation fundraisers. He also complimented the finance staff for their work in maintaining the Museum's perfect rating for financial management.

He noted that while revenue is down about \$51,000 dollars from the same period last year, visitation is actually up 5%; this reflects the sale prices and coupons the Museum used to allow more students from cash-strapped schools to attend the Museum at a reduced rate. He reported that school field trip numbers are about the same as last year, and that Foundation grant funds allowed even more underprivileged schools to attend.

He reminded attendees that capital projects are often able to proceed even in tight budget times; for example the West African Site construction is funded by the American Frontier Culture Foundation and the infrastructure work on the expanded site is covered by state funds remaining from a previous fiscal year.

Mr. Avoli stated that he was pleased with the Museum's progress and work overall in spite of lean budget, and thanked Mr. Vames and Mr. Sibert for their work on property development projects. He also thanked Foundation Board Member Jeff Wood for his strong support of the Museum with equipment and supplies for construction projects. He noted that the previous evening's program "A Night with the Cochran's" was enjoyable and well planned by Foundation staff.

Mr. Avoli informed the Board that the dedication of the West African Site in July 2010 will require a substantial amount of planning and preparation. He asked all Board Members for ideas and support and in particular asked the Legislative Members for assistance in garnering state funds to support the event. Several Trustees complimented Mr. Avoli, Mr. Bryan and the Museum staff for their quality work and the welcoming atmosphere offered to the Igbo people who are participating.

## **Budget and Finance**

### **Close of FY 2009**

Mrs. Donna Smith, Fiscal Director, presented an overview of the Museum's finances. She noted that the Fall 2008 budget reductions were levied after the fiscal year had begun, and about one-quarter of the year's budget has been expended, thus making any cuts seem more damaging. She reviewed payroll, operating, budget reductions, capital, and cash balances.

### **Budget Reductions**

She reviewed required plans for a possible further 5, 10 or 15% reduction this Fall, and gave some history of the budget reductions at the Museum over the past several years.

### **Revenue**

Mrs. Smith reviewed the revenue report, now presented on a quarterly basis, and a revenue and visitation bar graph. She noted that revenue is down \$51,000 from FY08' and stated that the Museum's cost per person is about \$29.70. She stated that it has been difficult to obtain information from other state Museum's for comparison; several Trustees asked questions and some discussion followed.

### **IT**

Mrs. Smith continued that the Museum collaborates with VITA (Virginia Information Technology Agency) whose staff maintains computers and other electronic equipment. She reviewed the current concerns about the Museum's IT resources; fiber cables chewed by mice, old servers, aging POS and back-up systems. Goals for the upcoming year (s) include wireless service to some areas of the Museum, back-up system repair, and arranging for a larger in-house printing capacity for the marketing department.

## **Capital Projects**

### **Infrastructure Improvements**

Mr. Mark Gatewood reported that basic utilities will be available to the American sites soon; as will the capacity for fire hydrants, restroom, telephones, alarms as the exhibit sites expand further.

### **Maintenance Reserve**

He reported that the Museum must spend 80% of available funds each year; this year the Museum has replaced the 1850's house roof, replaced the fire and burglar alarms in the historic buildings, and finished some paving and pavement repair. Mr. Avoli added that there is a gate on Cochran parkway to restrict traffic after hours, and that as the AWASAW project gets underway, the Museum may ask them for assistance and advice in further securing our outlying exhibits.

## **Management Report Card**

Mr. Avoli reviewed a slide of the measures the state asks the Museum to rate itself on; Emergency Preparedness, Financial Management, Government Procurement, Human Resources and Information Technology. Mr. Gatewood described the E-Virginia procurement system noting agency challenges.

## **Visitor Experience and Satisfaction**

Mr. Avoli presented an example of a positive visitor report card and noted that the Museum calculates 99% of respondents rate their experience as good or excellent.

## **Marketing**

### **Visitation Report**

Marketing Director Mike Sutton reviewed the visitation report for FY09 and one month of FY10. He noted visitation was up 5% for FY09 over FY08 and general admission; school groups were up slightly and there was a small dip in general group visitation. Several Trustees asked questions and some discussion followed.

### **Special Events**

Mr. Sutton reviewed the new special events held during the past year, such as May Day, Wine Festival and BBQ Cook-off, and stated that these events brought approximately 5,000 extra visitors to the Museum.

### **Agency Productivity Measure**

Mr. Sutton has been measuring marketing cost per visitor, and has established a baseline figure of \$2.54 for FY08; FY09 was \$2.36 and his target is \$2 per person by FY12. In FY09 the marketing budget was \$157, 438.

### **Marketing Plan for Upcoming Fiscal Year**

Mr. Sutton reported that the marketing plan for FY10 is similar to that for FY09 with print ads, internet ads, TV and radio ads in the Charlottesville, Harrisonburg and local areas. He will use enhanced website add-ons, social networking sites, education marketing via e-copy, as well as a few standard approaches such as direct mail to teachers, and new focus program on site for teachers to learn about Museum programs. Some discussion followed.

## **Exhibits and Programs**

### **West African Farm Progress /Construction**

Mr. Avoli reviewed construction and activity on the West African Site since Spring, and especially noted that new relationships which have emerged as a result of the collaborations. As of now, he reported that two homes are complete and two are in progress. Over the summer about twenty high school and college students worked on the site as well as over one hundred other volunteers from the Igbo diaspora living all across the United States. On Labor Day weekend, about fifty more Igbo volunteers are expected to arrive to work on the site. The goal is to have the homes and a portion of the wall substantially completed by the end of October, winterize the site, and resume work in Spring in advance of a July 17, 2010 dedication. Mr. Avoli will travel to Nigeria in late September, to attend the Igbo national Congress as the guest of Governor Peter Obi, Governor of Anambra State.

### **West African Site Programming**

Program planning is underway and Professor JAK Njoku will be in residence at the Museum from January – August 2010 to complete work. Mr. Avoli continued that the Igbo Immersion and Teacher's Institute programs this summer were successful. He also reported that two Members of the American Igbo community will join the Museum's Board's of Directors and Trustees.

### **Schoolhouse Progress**

Mr. Avoli reported that due to wet Spring weather and other project needs, the schoolhouse construction is a bit behind schedule but is expected to be completed by December 1.

### **Schoolhouse Programming**

Mr. Avoli reported that the research is complete and an overview will be distributed to staff and volunteers. The draft text of the interpretive sign is ready; the sign and overall plan will be ready by Spring 2010.

### **Staffing Exhibits with Staff Reductions**

Mr. Alex Tillen reviewed plans to oversee the school field trip season in the absence of a full time Education Director. He and three interpretive staff plus the reservationist will manage the programs; he also mentioned that the Education and Interpretation Committee will meet in the near future.

### **Report from the Foundation**

Mrs. Maricia Capps, President of the American Frontier Culture Foundation reported a successful year for the Foundation, in large part due to the Strategic Plan developed three years ago under the leadership of Mr. Dan Layman. She reported that for Fiscal Year 2009, fundraising for unrestricted funds exceeded the goal by more than 30%; and fundraising for restricted funds, the Foundation exceeded its goals by more than 80%. She also noted that special events raised more than 300% of the goal for the year and membership also increased. The Museum Store, even with a slow economy ended the year with a modest profit. She especially commended Fran Carrington, Foundation manager and the Museum Store's staff for their hard work and dedication. She reviewed each Board of Director's Committee's projects for the past year and noted several upcoming projects. She informed the Board that a new staff Member will join the Foundation team within a few weeks, replacing Linda Bowers, and that Mr. Dan Layman has accepted another position locally and will be leaving in September. She described funding needs for FY10 and updated the Board on an anonymous challenge grant to support the volunteer program. She urged all Board Members to financially support the Museum, and thanked them for their support in past years.

**Old Business** - Mr. Vames asked Mr. Avoli to report on the progress of the AWASAW project. Mr. Avoli responded that it is his understanding the artisan's center will break ground by late fall this year, and will likely take about two years to complete.

**New Business** - No items of new business were brought forward

### **Ratification Items**

#### **1. Collections policy and items for deaccession**

Mr. Sibert made a motion, seconded by Senator Hanger, that the Board approve the items for de-accessioning and the updates to the collections policy. The motion was approved unanimously.

#### **2. Ratification of Trustees Actions**

Mr. Nolen made a motion, seconded by Dr. Bunch, that the Board that the Board affirm and ratify all its prior actions as stated in the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

#### **3. Authorize Member of Board from out of state**

Delegate Plum made a motion, seconded by Mr. Vames that the Board approve the appointment, with Gubernatorial approval, to the Board of Trustees of Dr. Nwachukwu Anakwenze of Los Angeles, California. The motion was approved unanimously.

#### **4. Planning Committee Authorization**

Mr. Sheets made a motion, seconded by Mr. Nolen, that the Board approve the creation of a Planning Committee consisting of staff, Board and community leaders to prepare for the West African Site dedication next July 17, 2010. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment was offered.

### **Next Meeting Date -**

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia is scheduled for April 9, 2010.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.